

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
September 9, 2018

The Family Church:

Part 1 – The Perfect Family

Ephesians 1:3-7

Service Introduction

As we begin the Family Church series, please remember that whenever I speak of the family, I am not referring just to people who are related to you. We will certainly make applications about the nuclear family, mom and dad and the kids. But I also always want you to hear the word family in a larger context. That the family can refer to any gathering where you love and care for each other. It is my prayer that the Life Groups, the small groups in our congregation, become family for you.

Jesus said that the foundation upon which he would build his Church is the confession that the Apostle Peter made: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” With that confession we are saying that the Son of God died for my sins and that is payment enough.



That foundation is solid and immovable, like the marble stone at the front of the church. But the next stone upon which Jesus builds his church is the family and that is far less secure (illustrated by a folding coffee table). It is in the family that most of us have learned that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is in the family that most of us have learned what love and forgiveness means. If Satan can destroy the family, he has gone a long way to destroying God's entire church.

(In the illustration, I moved the coffee table resting on the marble stone floor. When that “family block” is moved from the Jenga game, the entire tower comes tumbling down.)

Today we are beginning an eight-week study with the prayer that the Holy Spirit would rebuild what Satan has destroyed. Today I hope that each of us walks out celebrating the fact that we truly are part of a **Perfect Family**.

Prior to the message, there was a video testimony by a single mother within our congregation. Hers is not the “perfect family” she had envisioned.

What is “the perfect family”? Beth’s story reminds us that our families are far from perfect.

The Perfect Family

There was only one perfect family, the one that God established in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:18-24). There are three aspects of that perfect family that I want to mention.

First, God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

God created us for companionship. One of the promises of God that we have repeated often leading up to this message series is from Psalm 68 that “God sets the lonely in families.”

In the perfect family, no one ever faces Satan’s attacks alone.

Secondly, God created Eve to be a helper for Adam. In the perfect family, each member of the family understands the family relationship isn’t all about “me,” but that I am called into this family as a helper. It makes no difference if you are a husband or wife, a child or parent, or simply a Christian friend, God has called you into that relationship to be a helper to others.

Thirdly, Adam looked at Eve through the Creator’s eyes. There is joy and excitement when he sees Eve for the first time. “Now! This time! This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.”

In the perfect family, we look at each other through our Creator’s eyes and can rejoice that our spouse or our child, our friend or fellow small group member is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).

Are any of us part of this perfect family? Sadly, no!

It is not uncommon for us to feel horribly alone. You may be married or part of a large family. You are all part of a large family here at St. Paul’s. Yet how often doesn’t Satan convince you that you are all alone? How often doesn’t he enable us to look at others in our family or circle of friends, and rather than see them through our Creator’s eyes, we find fault with them? Rather than rejoicing in our role as helper to those around us, we resent the demands on our time. “Why am I always the one who is giving in?”

Alone, feeling used, in relationships with broken people who hurt us.

Not one of us enjoys a perfect family.

The Imperfect Family

That’s why I so appreciate our Gospel Lesson for today, Mark 7:24-30, the account of a non-Jewish woman who comes begging Jesus for crumbs.

Hers was not a perfect family. She was the “wrong kind” of people. A Gentile, not an Israelite. Was she a single mom? Where was the dad? We don’t know? She had a daughter that no one

could love, demon-possessed. Matthew's gospel (15:21-28) even tells us that Jesus' disciples saw her as a nuisance and asked Jesus to send her away.

As I think about Beth's video testimony, I wonder how many lies Satan spread into her heart. Lies about herself... she was unacceptable. Lies about her daughter... she was impure and unhealable. Lies about her relationship with Jesus... he would never want her.

But thanks be to God the Holy Spirit. We see a miracle... a faith that is persistent, that begs for crumbs from the Master's table.

What are the lies Satan is convincing you of... about yourself? About the hopelessness of your situation? About the impure spirits that you see in members of your immediate family or here in God's family at St. Paul's?

Dear friends, don't give up because you see yourself as part of an imperfect family. We all are! But Jesus came to make us part of a Perfect Family.

Perfect Family

Let's read Ephesians 1:3-7.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

This section can destroy Satan's lies about yourself. You can see your faults as a wife or husband or parent or child or friend. But those faults, those sins, do not define who you are. Your identity is found here, on the foundation of Christ. Look over that passage again and notice all the references to Jesus.

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The foundation of God's Church and so also the foundation of every Family Church, whether it be a relational family or a group of friends who meet as a Life Group here at St. Paul's... the foundation of every Christian family is Jesus.

Now look again at that passage and see the new identity Jesus gives you.

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

You are God's chosen ones. You are the ones that God predestined or decided in advance that you would be his child. You were not born into this family. God knew you, all your faults and failures as a spouse or parent or child or friend, and yet he chose you, adopted you, to be his own.

You are forgiven. The blood that Jesus shed on the cross has paid for every one of your sins. So who are you? You are a "holy one." You are one that God looks at and says, "You are blameless." You are perfect.

If you are God's son or daughter, and he sees you as perfect, then take heart, right now with all your brokenness, you are part of a perfect family! God's family.

And as such you equipped to deal with the imperfection of your earthly families.

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You have every spiritual blessing that you need. You have what it takes! Don't give up. God himself has equipped you with what you need for your family right now!

And he has given you a purpose.

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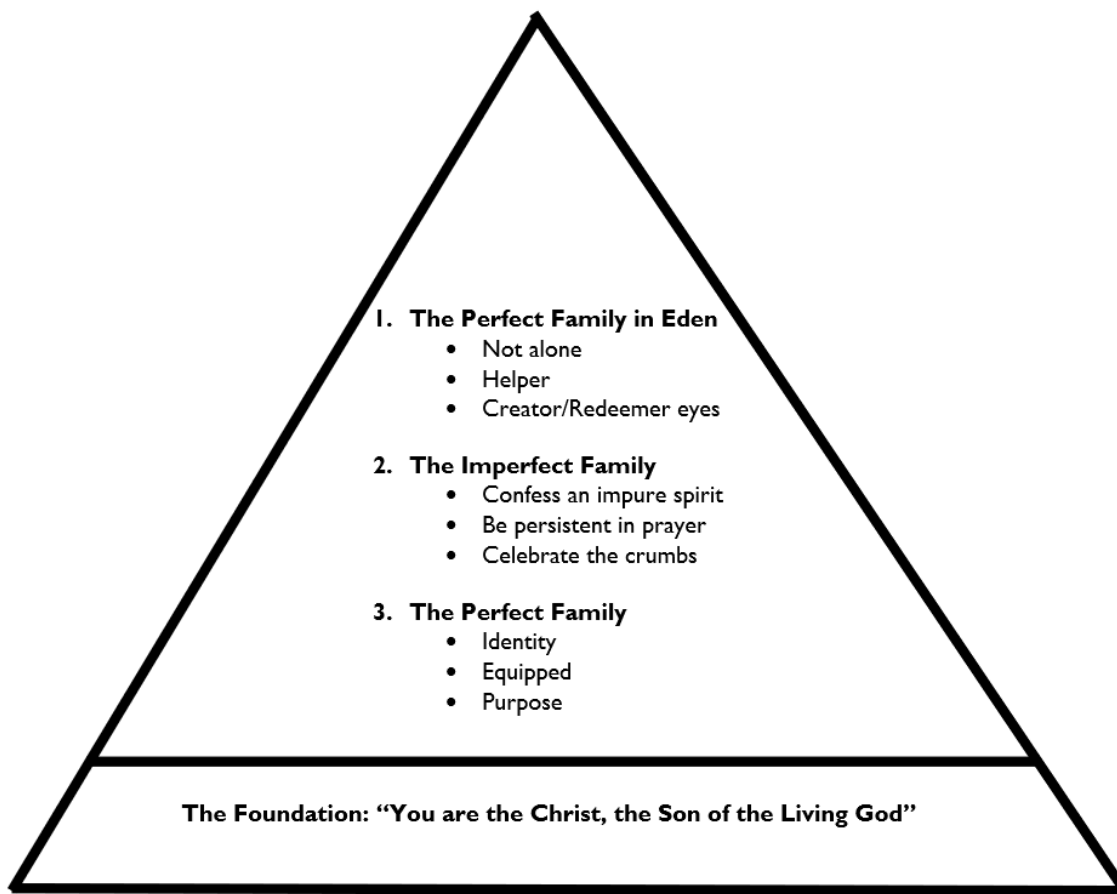
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Why are you and I struggling in so many ways? Because it is in the midst of our brokenness that God's glorious grace is praised. In Romans 5:20, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The more clearly I see my failures as a dad and husband, the more I appreciate God's grace, the more I want to live in a way that says, "I am filled with blame, but I trust my Savior that in his sight I am absolutely without blame."

My goal is not to try to become part of the perfect family, but to praise God that in Christ I already am part of the perfect family.

So today, as we begin the Family Church series, I ask you to join with me in making a commitment to build up your family, whether it be your family by blood or your family by choice in your small group or your group of friends.

Let's make a commitment to build up our family churches step by step from the foundation up.



Let's claim our identity.

Chosen by God. God's Child. Holy in his sight.

Let's claim the promise that we are equipped. I don't feel like it, but I have every spiritual blessing in Christ. I have what God knows I need to serve the families into which he has placed me.

Let's claim our purpose. Not to be perfect, but to glorify God by admitting our imperfections and that his grace is sufficient to cover all my sins.

Let's confess the impure spirit with each of us. Let's claim the responsibility that what makes my family imperfect is first of all me, and that I want to change.

Let's claim the promise that if we ask, God answers. Let's be like that woman that Jesus seemed to be ignoring. He wasn't ignoring her. He heard every word. Let's pray be persistent in prayer for the imperfect families of which we are a part.

Let's celebrate the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Your God has done great things in your family in answer to prayer. He will do great things in your family in answer to prayer. Let's make the commitment to look over our lives with a spirit of thanksgiving.

Related to that, let's make the commitment to see each other through our Creator's eyes like Adam did. But now, let's also look at each other through our Redeemer's eyes. As God in Christ has forgiven us, let's forgive each other. Every family, whether it be a family by blood or a small group, has an "EGR," and "extra grace required" person. It is easy to find fault. But perhaps that person is in your family to challenge you. Can I look at that person through my Creator's eyes and see the good he or she brings to the family? Can I look at that person through my Redeemer's eyes and see he or she is perfectly forgiven by my Savior and precious to him?

Let's step into our families understanding our role. We are in this family not primarily to receive, but to give, to be a helper that God has created to bless the others in our family.

And most of all, let us commit to the truth that it is "not good to be alone." This is what makes me believe that we need to turn off the screens in our lives to spend time together because those screens isolate us. This is what leads me to believe in small groups so fervently today. I fervently pray that no one, no child in a home, no father or mother, no single parent, no widow or widower, no high school student or college student, no single person or married person, no young person or old person, that none of us faces life alone. That we make a commitment to do what I called in the email this week, "To pray dangerously." By that I mean that we pray that God would use us to answer our prayers. Lord, let no one face life alone. Let me be a part of the answer to this prayer. Lord, lead me to be in family relationships, to be in small groups, not for simply for my own sake, but because you have called me to be a helper.

By the way, as we step up to take communion, someone might bump this thing and make it all fall down. That's ok. Then just start building it again. That's the whole point. Until we get to heaven, we will always have the call to build up the Family Church. Amen.

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Next Steps toward a Family Church

- **Use the Family Church Daily Devotions** for yourself and/or your family. Copies are available in the Welcome Center. The daily devotion will also be emailed. If you don't already receive Pastor Pete's weekly email, please write your email on the Connection Card and check your Clutter to see if these emails are there.
- **Join a Life Group.** Join the 200 others at St. Paul's/The Bridge who gather in small groups as spiritual families. Check **GroupLink** on the Connection Card.
- **Pray for "crumbs."** Pray that Jesus might use just the crumbs of his power and love to build up Family Churches (relational families and functional families like Life Groups) so that no one faces Satan's attacks alone.

GroupWork

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1. Share one of your favorite memories from your youth.
2. How do you see Satan attacking the family today?
3. What might Satan stand to gain if he is successful in his attacks on Christian families?
4. Read Genesis 2:18-24. What lessons can we learn for family life from God's establishment of this first family?
5. Parenting and guilt are almost synonymous for many people. We can easily find fault in our own parenting or in the parenting of others. Read Psalm 103: 8-19. What verses from this psalm can comfort parents who feel overwhelmed and defeated?
6. Read Ephesians 1:3-7. We are best prepared to be spiritual leaders to others in our family (our relational family or our functional family) when we are certain of our own identity as children of God. What words or phrases in this section reaffirm that awesome identity?
7. Break up into groups of two or three, ideally all male or all female groups. Share prayer requests for your family or a family member. Take turns praying for the needs that someone else in the group has shared.